



**Michigan
Nurses
Association**

An Affiliate of National Nurses United

Headquarters
2310 Jolly Oak Road
Okemos, MI 48864
phone: 517.349.5640
fax: 517.349.5818
web: www.minurses.org

Marquette
220 W. Washington Street, Suite 100
Marquette, MI 49855
phone: 906.226.7053
fax: 906.226.2701



Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing re: SB 642 and SB 643

Violence Against Health Care Professionals

Tuesday, September 20th, 2011 at 2:30 pm

Testimony by Ken Fletcher

Associate Executive Director of Government Relations and Outreach

Michigan Nurses Association

Good afternoon Senator Jones and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. On behalf of the Michigan Nurses Association, I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of SB 642 and SB 643 today.

Over the last several years, violence toward health care professionals has been on the rise. Whether the cause is society or the economy, I don't know...but nurses are experiencing violence on the job more than ever before.

According to the Emergency Nurses Association, "More than half of emergency department nurses have been physically assaulted at work." These episodes of being physically assaulted include being spit on, hit, pushed or shoved and scratched or kicked while on the job.

The Emergency Nurses Association also found that, "One in four (nurses) have experienced such violence more than 20 times in the past three years. Just as alarming, one in five nurses have experienced verbal abuse more than 200 times during the same period."

Nursing care is the reason why individuals are admitted to a hospital. If you don't require nursing care, you are sent home to recover and recuperate. If nurses are working in an environment where they are constantly working in fear for their personal health and well-being, the focus is no longer on the patients who require medical attention.

According to a national survey of ER nurses between May 2009 and February 2010, conducted by the Emergency Nurses Association's Emergency Department, 97.1 percent of physical violence was perpetrated by patients and their relatives. These are the very people health care professionals work day in and day out to take care of.

Authors of a report entitled "Violence Against Nurses Working in U.S. Emergency Departments" recommended that on a federal and a state level, there should be laws to protect nurses from violence. Right now, laws protecting nurses vary by state and many states have no such laws in place.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, "Workplace violence is a serious occupational hazard, ranking among the top four causes of death in workplaces during the past 15 years.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics found that "More than 3,000 people died from workplace homicide between 2006 and 2010 and an average of more than 15,000 nonfatal workplace injury cases was reported annually during this time."

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration also found that hospitals in New York and Massachusetts have had a number of employees killed due to a high volume of assaults. As you can see, this is not just a growing Michigan problem. It's nationwide.

The state of Massachusetts is the inspiration for our two bills today. Massachusetts was finally able to pass workplace violence legislation during their last legislative session, after pushing for it for several years. The Massachusetts Nurses Association found that "workers in the health care sector are 16 times more likely to be confronted with violence on the job than any other service profession."

SB 642 and SB 643 go hand in hand as a package that firmly addresses the problem of violence against health care professionals in a concise and firm way. It clearly sets up guidelines by which to prosecute those individuals who take out their anger and frustrations on nurses and other health care professionals in a violent manner.

That kind of behavior is unacceptable and we don't tolerate it for other groups of individuals who are in the business of serving others, like police officers and fire fighters. Health care professionals serve people when they need care the most, so we need to do what we can to keep those individuals safe so they can do their job.

We have some nurses in the room with us today who have some very compelling stories to share for why this legislation is so important and why we've needed it for a long time. I hope you will seriously take into account the testimonies you are about to hear. Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to speak to you today.

